

Bromeliad Expose By Larry Giroux



In Memoriam

Kiti Wenzel

1908-2007

By Larry Giroux

Kiti Wenzel was an extraordinary woman, teacher and artist. On Friday, September 14th, 2007 she was taken from us, 4 months shy of her 100th birthday.

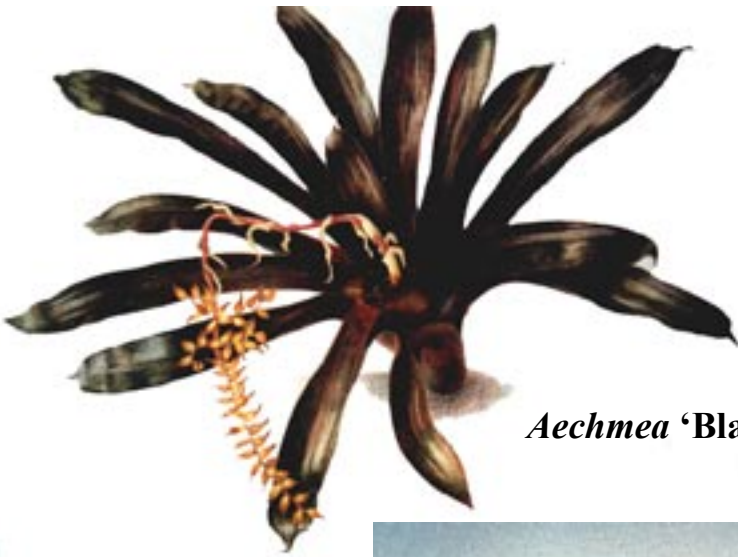
Kiti was already demonstrating her artistic talents in high school; and it was a series of drawings in her high school paper that earned her a full scholarship to the Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Here she started her artistic career after graduation. Much of her time was spent educating children in the principles of art. Kiti moved from Philadelphia to Florida in 1956; during the 1960's she and her husband owned and operated a restaurant, art studios and gallery on Fort Myers Beach, while still teaching art to a limited number of students. After a move to Sarasota, where

she continued her career as a professional artist, she moved back to Fort Myers.



The photo to the left is of Neoregelia 'Kiti Wenzel'. This is one of two plants selected from the grex of Neoregelia johannis 'Fairchild' X Neoregelia 'Vulkan' hybridized by Dean Fairchild and named to honor Kiti. The

other plant of the Grex is named Neoregelia 'Magic Palette', which has mottling of the leaves and a coral coloration of the center. Dean Fairchild has been an admirer of Kiti and her work for over 25 years and owns more than 20 pieces of her art.)



Aechmea 'Black Magic'

*Aechmea
nudicaulis*



*Billbergia
chlorostricta*



Cryptanthus 'Silver Star' and *Cryptanthus* 'Pink Starlite'

Neoregelia
 'Magic Palette'
 is from the
 same Grex as
Neoregelia
 Kiti Wenzel'



Neoregelia
olens



Billbergia pyramidalis (left) - This was one of Kiti's first horticultural drawings. It was a commercial success, when she sold it in quantities as a large framed poster. Neoregelia

'Big Bands' (bottom) - Neos were appealing to Kiti; she drew many during her career. Tillandsia cyanea (top, right)- This is one of several drawing where the inflorescence is emphasized.





(Top) *Aechmea orlandiana* 'Hayward' - This is a good example of the detail that Kiti employed in her drawings. *Cryptanthus* 'Windsong' & 'Black Mystic' (bottom) - *Cryptanthus* were a favorite subject for Kiti. Until her death she grew several at the entrance to her home. *Tillandsia streptophylla* (right) - Kiti's earliest pictures were more abstract and although nearly all her horticultural drawings were life like, with this plant she reverted to an earlier style.





'Garden'

Kiti



ae castelnavii

Kiti



As mentioned earlier, Kiti would pains-takenly cut out the plants in her drawings and reassemble them in collages. Here are a collection of some of the recycled bromeliad pictures.



Tillandsia

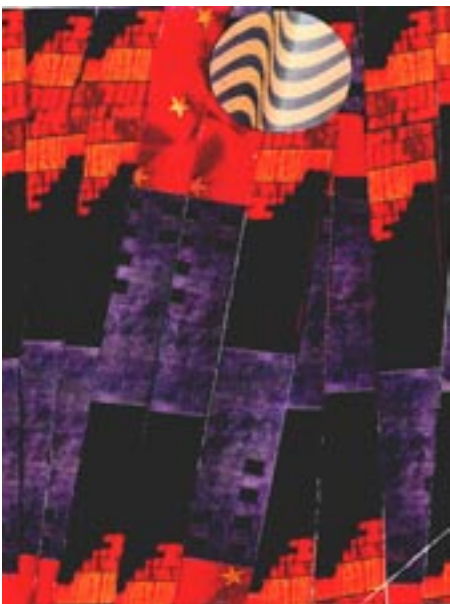
Kiti

“Lilies”

was one of many non-bromeliad drawings created by Kiti. She was interested in the shape, color and markings of all types of flowers and leaves.



Although she seemed to prefer colored pencils as the medium for many of her horticultural drawings, she also used watercolors as with this collection of orchids and *Tillandsia streptophylla* seen on a previous page.



Kiti loved color, patterns and shapes and applied them to her abstract style during her early years. She would find a pattern or shape and construct a collage of these objects. To the left is one of Kiti's earlier collages called "Sky Hi" demonstrating her unique technics. Although there is the large rendition of this drawing, this is a copy of a note card. Kiti had most of her artwork made into note cards, which she personally sold at various events.



Kiti was fascinated with the forms and patterns of neoregelias. Above is Kiti's rendition of Neoregelia 'Takemura Princeps. It was likely that this was drawn from a plant given to her by Dean Fairchild, who commissioned Kiti to create many horticultural drawing currently hanging in his home. Below is a collage of two Aechmea brevicollis. Kiti was known for cutting up her drawings then reassembling them into collages. In the on-line version of this issue is a series of her "collections".

It was in 1981 that Kiti did her first drawing of a bromeliad, Billbergia pyramidalis, which was given to her by a friend. In 1985 she joined the CBS and was intrigued by the wonderful and varied forms of bromeliads and other botanicals. Her switch from impressionistic and abstract painting to the realism of growing plants was fueled by the various plants she intentionally grew for the purpose of using for study and as models. Kiti once wrote “the surprise of each different and individual inflorescence is enough excitement to inspire drawing to record the many varieties nature produces”.

There are hundreds of her original watercolors and colored pencil drawings of bromeliads adorning homes throughout the World; Kiti’s collection of horticultural print greeting cards remain cherished gifts when sent by a friend; and her numerous Art Exhibitions held over the last 4 decades here in Florida were memorable events. Her generosity is well documented by her contributions of her works to many auctions of local and international organizations as well as providing posters and original designs for World Bromeliad Conferences’ publications.



Kiti did numerous black ink drawings of bromeliads. Many eventually were reproduced in color. Right after Kiti joined the Caloosahatchee Bromeliad Society in 1985, Gene McKenzie convinced Kiti to provide many cover drawing for the CBS Newsletter. Of course at that time the Meristem was only a few mimeographed pages, but Kiti’s drawing added an elegance to the relatively new publication. A very detailed rendering of *Aechmea fasciata* was one of the drawings used on the Meristem cover.

Although we will never see her picture surrounded by the Shmucker's logo on the "Today Show" with Willard Scott... announcing to the world her 100th birthday, Kiti has still left her own unique label on canvases, cards, tee-shirts and most importantly on the hearts of all who knew and admired her. For over 75 years, she constructed a legacy as a teacher and creator of beauty. The diversity of Kiti's work has distinguished her as a truly exceptional artist and especially as a master of "botanical art". She captured nature with pencils, ink and paint so that many others could enjoy it; and in so doing, Kiti Wenzel, in spite of her passing, allows us to keep her creativity and inspirations close to us for a long time to come.



Later used as notecards, the drawings of T. ehlersiana, T. streptophylla, T. xerographica and C. 'Black Magic', were first seen on the cover pages of the Meristem.